

Gorbachev to Lithuanians: Pay for Independence

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 7—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has demanded that Lithuania pay billions of rubles in economic compensation to Moscow if the republic is to secede from the Soviet Union, according to Lithuanian officials.

In an interview broadcast on Lithuanian television tonight, Lithuanian Communist leader Algirdas Brazauskas said that Gorbachev had told him in a meeting earlier this week that if Lithuania became independent it would owe Moscow 17 billion rubles (\$27 billion at the inflated official rate) for capital investment in factories and other enterprises and 4 billion rubles (\$6 billion) for undelivered goods.

The newly elected Lithuanian parliament is expected to declare the republic independent on Sunday or Monday, and Lithuanian officials said that Gorbachev's economic demands were an indication of the

difficult negotiations ahead between Moscow and Vilnius. Algimantas Zukas, Brazauskas' chief aide, said Gorbachev was "clearly putting down a negotiating point. You could call it a threat if you want."

"But it's not as if we're running to the bank to make a withdrawal," Zukas said, adding, "the way we see it, perhaps it is Moscow that should be paying Vilnius reparation."

Radio Vilnius called Gorbachev's demand "an attempt to intimidate Lithuania for the last time before the new parliament embarks on its activity."

"This is an attempt to further complicate the situation, to drag out the process of negotiation and throw fear into the people so they will be scared of their own independence," said Vytautas Landsbergis, president of the independence movement Sajudis, which now has a majority of the seats in the Lithuanian parliament.

Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 under a secret pact with Nazi Germany. The independence move-

ment in Lithuania has proceeded with the greatest speed mainly because it has a lower percentage of Russians and other ethnic minorities than the other Baltic republics.

Members of the Lithuanian parliamentary commission drafting the document called "The Principles of Restoring Lithuanian Independence" said that the declaration would "reestablish" the republic's independence in politics, international relations, culture and economics. Old treaty relations would be resumed with other countries, including the Soviet Union.

The Supreme Soviet in Moscow, the country's standing legislature, has worked on a draft law on how a republic can legally secede from the union, a process that would require a referendum in the republic and approval by the national legislature after a five-year waiting period. The Lithuanians have called this draft law an attempt to stifle their demand, and they are hoping that by declaring their independence before a special session of the Con-

gress of People's Deputies, parent body of the Supreme Soviet, convenes on Monday they will be exempt from the new law.

At the special session of the national legislature, Gorbachev is likely to win passage of a new law giving the country's president—presumably himself—much wider executive power.

Some Lithuanian leaders, including Romualdas Ozolas of Sajudis, say they expect that Moscow will use economic pressure as its principal means of leverage against the independence movement. Ozolas said that the republic has "already begun to feel the pinch—not a full blockade, certainly, but certain slowdowns of deliveries, sudden shortages that look like political pressure and nothing else."

Landsbergis, who said he has been looking for a clearer signal of support from President Bush, met with U.S. diplomats in Moscow today, including Ambassador Jack Matlock, but he said the meeting "did not produce much."